

Speech from the Throne

• (2120)

Is it any wonder businessmen in Atlantic Canada have called into question the federal government's stated dedication to the long-term development of the Atlantic economy on a planned and orderly basis? Is it any wonder we look with suspicion at the Department of Regional Economic Expansion and the minister who runs this department, since DREE is obviously nothing more than a well financed give-away program to be extended or retracted according to the economic and political exigencies of this minister?

The sad truth is that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) has refused to subscribe to any specific long-term goals and targets for the Atlantic region. The minister was asked only last month by the chairman of the Atlantic Development Council if he would focus his department's policies on a long-range plan to reduce the unemployment rate in Atlantic Canada to 4 or 4.5 per cent by 1980. If he would not do this, he was asked to have his 140 or more planning department experts prepare statistics and arguments showing why such a goal was unattainable.

What was the minister's response? I regret he is unable to be present tonight, because I do not like to refer to him and his department in his absence, but such are the difficulties of being a Member of Parliament. He said the government could not commit itself to targets unless it was certain that both the international and national economies would operate at optimum levels during the next ten years. Obviously, the department of Regional Economic Expansion does not know where it is going or what it wants to do beyond the next election. This raises a number of serious questions. Has the minister seriously examined the Atlantic Development Council's goals and, if so, has he determined that they cannot be met? If this is true, does it follow that no significant improvement in the economy of the Atlantic region is to be expected?

Are we destined to forever suffer an unemployment rate of 10 per cent or more in Atlantic Canada, since Ottawa with all its bureaucrats is incapable of predicting with any accuracy the trend of our national and international economy over a ten-year period? Or does it simply mean that the Trudeau administration, in light of recent political events, has shrugged its shoulders about forming Atlantic provinces' regional goals and could not care less about formulating national goals?

Normally, we in Atlantic Canada would be inclined to applaud the proposed increase in DREE's budget to \$500 million in 1972-73 compared with estimates of \$450 million this year, but in view of the department's aimlessness, its lack of goals, targets and direction the question may well be asked whether further DREE spending is not just hastening the day of national disenchantment over the entire federal regional development effort. A ten-year goal of reducing Atlantic regional unemployment to 4.5 per cent should not be considered unattainable or utopian. In fact, the Economic Council of Canada, in its 1959 sixth annual review, said that its target of a 3 per cent unemployment rate nationally was still valid as a goal for the mid-1970s. Obviously, when writing this report the Economic Council had not taken into consideration the

numbing effects of this administration's socialistic policies upon the Canadian business community.

In my opinion, the federal government should commit itself to strengthening the Canadian economy over a reasonable and specified time period so that unemployment could be reduced to 4 or 4.5 per cent of the labour force. However, to do this the government must first put its own house in order. It must practice economies in its operation. It must realize that every dollar spent in the public sector must first be taken away from the private or producing sector of our economy. I say this because the 4 to 4.5 per cent unemployment rate is not an acceptable long-term figure. We must strive to do better than that. But the most annoying, most frustrating and galling fact of all is that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion and the Trudeau government have refused to accept a long-term goal of 4.5 per cent unemployed as a possibility for Atlantic Canada.

I warn the cabinet and the Prime Minister that we in Atlantic Canada will be judging this government in the months ahead, not by its promises but by its performances in the past four years. Our present unemployment rate is a sad and tragic commentary on the inadequacy of the government's policies. To us in Atlantic Canada it seems strange that this government can plan a \$30 million redevelopment across the Ottawa river by removing the E. B. Eddy plant over the next ten years, but cannot initiate a ten-year plan for the reduction of unemployment in Atlantic Canada. By their actions he shall know them, and we know now where their priorities lie.

The Speech from the Throne states that Canada's primary food producers, our farmers and our fishermen, form one of the traditional and still basic strengths of our economy and that measures will be taken to improve prices to our fishermen and our farmers. In view of the economic plight of our primary producers, I sincerely hope the words in the Throne Speech are not an idle promise. Our farmers, for example, in Atlantic Canada are faced with increased costs for feed, seed, labour, machinery, gas, oil, fertilizer and insecticide while the prices they receive for some of their products are as low or lower than they were five years ago.

Then on February 14, 1972, for the ninth time in 24 months our farmers, our fishermen and our businessmen in the Maritimes faced another rise in freight rates. Because of these adverse freight rates our producers, especially our agricultural producers, are losing markets, even in our own province of Nova Scotia. I say this because volume, containerization and streamlining of shipping procedures have made it cheaper to ship goods from 1,000 miles away compared to 100 miles if the volume is small. For example, producers in Nova Scotia have learned that agricultural products can now be shipped from Ontario to London, England, at a lower cost than they could be shipped from points in Nova Scotia under the new, combined rail-ocean container service.

The entire inland freight shipment is absorbed by the consortium, a rail-ocean container partnership, while the Nova Scotian shipper has to pay the same ocean rate as the combined rate and in addition must pay to get his shipment to Halifax. Obviously, we must resign ourselves to the fact that our maritime situation of being beside the ocean no longer assures us of any advantage in transport-